

In Grizzly Country

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

ENJOYING BEAR COUNTRY

Bears are wild, dangerous animals. If you are in bear country, you must be cautious and alert in camp and on the trail; you must be careful in your use and disposal of food and garbage; and you must know what to do in an emergency.

The situation is a lot like driving a car -- a car is a lethal machine. A driver must always be alert and cautious. He must know what to do in an emergency. But most people accept this situation as a matter of course and enjoy their ride.

We want you to enjoy the National Parks, too!

Since Biblical times and before, men have understood the value of going into the wilderness to refresh the spirit and body. Our preserved wilderness lands embrace virgin forests, great valleys, and alpine meadows, and some of the Nation's loftiest mountains. They contain countless streams and lakes from which great quantities of pure water flow.

It is thrilling and satisfying enough for most people to camp in the great open spaces when night falls and enjoy the soul-healing freedom of living in a world apart from the pressures of their daily lives. But these are areas shared with wild animals like the grizzly bear, which must have the wilderness habitat to survive. The opportunity to walk the same ground as a great bear requires something of man -- caution, common sense, and some basic knowledge of the animal.

The grizzly is a vanishing species. There may be no more than 1,000 remaining in the United States outside of Alaska. Most roam unseen in the back country of the Northern Rockies. Perhaps a third or more of these live in the National Parks where they are protected by law.

While the grizzly is the most fearsome animal, black bears are also worthy of utmost respect and caution. Never forget that bears in the National Parks are wild and they are dangerous. They can injure a visitor and damage his belongings. They are particularly dangerous when startled, when approached too closely, or when they have lost their fear of man.

As a whole, bears are secretive creatures, usually anxious to give man a wide berth. Black bears sometimes prowl through the campgrounds in search of food, but grizzlies are rarely seen except in the back country. Even there, they are not a common sight. But, if you are in bear country, be on the alert and take some precautions. Have some idea what to do, based on the experience of others, in case you come face to face with a bear.

Remember, too, there are no hard and fast rules to insure protection from a bear attack. Bear behavior differs under different conditions.

BACK - COUNTRY HIKING

Don't hike alone in bear country. Stay with a group.

Watch for bear droppings, tracks, and diggings. They are signs there have been bears around. If you see one at a distance, make a wide detour around it, keeping up wind so the bear will get your scent and know you are there. If you can't detour, wait until the bear moves away from your

route. The rule is to stay as far away from the animal as possible.

Under most circumstances, bears avoid people, so it is a good idea to make your presence known. That's why experienced hikers wear bells or put some pebbles in a tin can to rattle as they walk. Whistling and loud talking are other ways to signal your presence. However, noise is not a foolproof way of avoiding bears.

KEEP CALM

What should you do if you are suddenly confronted by a grizzly? Whatever you do, try to remain calm.

If the grizzly is not aggressive and merely stands its ground, probably you should stand still, too. Don't run! This frequently excites the bear into pursuit. Do not move toward the bear. It may feel you are invading its territory and react accordingly. The animal may simply be curious about the noise and waiting until the source comes into the focus of its weak eyes.

A grizzly will often rise on its hind legs. If it does, it may be effective to speak softly to the animal. Steady, soft human monotones often appear effective in assuring bears that no harm is meant to them. However, while standing your ground and speaking softly, look for a tree to climb.

If the animal advances aggressively, your next move depends on the distance to the tree, which ought to be tall enough to get you out of reach of the bear (only young grizzlies can climb trees). As a delaying action it might help to drop some sizeable item - a bedroll or camera for instance - which may divert the bear and give you more time to retreat. If you can get up a tree, stay there until you are certain the bear is out of the area.

DEFENSIVE HIKING

In bear country, noisy hikers are safest because they are least likely to surprise a bear. A loud, continuous talker may be your best companion on the trail, if not in camp.

It's a good idea to wear a little bell or let a can of rattling pebbles dangle from your belt as you walk.

If you see a bear, detour!

If you can't reach a tree, and the bear continues to advance, your best bet may be to play dead, lying on your stomach or on your side with your legs drawn up to your chest. Clasp your hands over the back of your neck. Grizzlies have passed by people in this position without harming them.

Others have been only slightly injured when the bear made one or two halfhearted slaps at them. Never harass a bear unless it is actually physically attacking someone. In such an emergency try to distract the bear from its victims by shouting or throwing sticks and stones. In any event, don't run blindly down the trail or through the brush, hoping to outdistance the bear. It will only excite the animal. Besides, a human can never expect to outrun a bear, especially in rugged terrain.

A mother grizzly with cubs is a special hazard. Most of the serious attacks in parks have occurred when people inadvertently have come upon a female with her cubs. The mother's natural protective instinct is highly developed, and she looks upon intruders as a threat to her family. She may attack, seemingly without provocation,

charging and slapping her forepaws at the nearest person and then passing on to others. If the human intruders have dropped to the ground to play dead, the sow may sniff each one and perhaps claw and bite them before moving her cubs to safety. Lying still under the jaws of a biting bear takes a lot of courage, but it may prevent greater injury or death. Resistance normally would be useless.

BACK - COUNTRY CAMPING

Back-country camping requires special precautions. An area frequented by bears is the wrong place to pitch a tent. So is a foot or animal trail. Bears travel on trails too, especially at night. Try to camp where there are trees handy. Campers must not throw away garbage or trash nor shall they bury garbage or food containers. Combustible trash should go in the fire. Tin cans and other noncombustible trash, except glass, should also be burned to destroy food odors. The cans must then be removed from the cold ashes, flattened, and transported out to the trailhead in plastic bags for deposit in trash containers.

Foodstuffs should be stored (preferably packaged in plastic) out of the reach of bears. Food can

CAMPING IN BEAR COUNTRY?

Don't camp in bear haunts or on trails.

Camp near trees where possible.

Keep food out of reach of bears.

Carry out trash that won't burn.

Burn combustible trash.

Keep a clean camp.

be suspended by ropes between two trees. If previous campers have left a dirty camp, clean up the mess for your own protection. Use dry, pre-packaged foods and avoid greasy, odorous foods such as bacon and ham. It's best not to sleep in the clothes you wore when cooking. Packs and sleeping bags should be kept clean and free of food odors. As a precaution against the presence of these odors, sleep some distance from your campfire and cooking area.

Pack out waste you can't burn in your campfire.

Special precautions apply to women. Perfumes, hair sprays, deodorants, and cosmetics should not be used or carried into the back country. There is some evidence that bears have been attracted and infuriated by these scents.

CAMPING IN REGULAR CAMPGROUNDS

As in the back country, a clean campground is less an attraction to bears than a dirty one. Food should be placed in tight containers out of reach of bears; it should not be kept in tents. Garbage and wastes should be put immediately into garbage containers provided in campgrounds. Wash picnic tables after use, burn bacon grease, and store your cookstove.

REPORTING BEAR SIGHTINGS AND INCIDENTS

The National Park Service will appreciate your assistance in keeping park personnel informed of sightings and damage or molestation by bears. Please report these incidents to any park ranger.

BEAR FACTS

An adult grizzly bear will stand 6 to 7 feet high. His coat may range in color from yellowish to dark brown or nearly black. Usually his hairs are tipped with white giving him a frosty or grizzled look.

The grizzly has a dished, or concave, face; long, curved, exposed claws on his front feet and a distinguishing hump above his shoulders (see picture on cover).

The smaller black bear stands only 5 to 6 feet high, is less massive, has shorter claws, and a straight muzzle.

Though we refer to the species as the black bear, these animals may in fact be brown, cinnamon, or even blond.

ALL BEARS ARE WILD.

ALL BEARS ARE DANGEROUS.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.



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